

Coins

'Guerrilla currency' steps out from pages of WW II history

By Roger Boye

FOLLOWING are questions from readers and answers that may be interesting or helpful to many of you:

Q — After the fall of the Philippines to the Japanese in 1942, many American and Philippine soldiers escaped and became guerrillas in the field. The United States government authorized these soldiers to print their own currency with the guarantee that the money would be honored in full after the war. I have several such notes. Are they valuable?

A — Unfortunately, most "guerrilla currency" from the Philippines has little collector value as coin dealers sell individual specimens of many such bills for less than a dollar. Nonetheless, the notes are great conversation pieces. The Japanese threatened to kill on the spot anyone in possession of such a note.

Q — Before the Pope's visit, I bought from a souvenir dealer three beautiful medals showing John Paul

II. Are they official collector items?

A — No. Several businesses in this country produced medals to commemorate the visit, but none of the medals was sanctioned by any government. Vatican City won't issue its first coins depicting John Paul II until late this year. Meanwhile, the Vatican's Numismatic Office is selling a 1,000-lire piece depicting John Paul I, probably the only coin that will mark his 34-day reign last year. For ordering information, write Numismatic Office and Vatican Branch Post Office, St. Peter's Square, Rome, Italy.

Q — Among some of my junk, I found a 1943-S penny that is silver in color. How can I find out what it is?

A — During 1943, the government made the one-cent piece from steel coated with zinc, rather than copper, a critical war material. Most of these pennies have a light, almost silver-colored appearance. A 1943-S cent in fine condition retails for about 25 cents.